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*Medio tutissimus ibis.* **OVID.**

It may be observed as a general truth, of those qualities whose combined support adds dignity to human character, that none of them have scarcely been found, by their own solitary and unaided light, to command from the universal mass, the awe of veneration, or the homage of respect. It is impossible that any one of those gifts which Divine munificence has bestowed upon man, can singly force

him into popularity, or ensure him applause, although counteracted by essential defects, and unadorned by corresponding beauties. It is from this established order in the government of things, that the social compact derives its vigor, and preserves its strength. If every goodly attribute of our nature, carried by itself a weight of general influence; if each individual grace, however lonely in the human heart, was of itself the herald of immortal fame; the world might quietly repose under the satisfaction of equal enjoyment, and honors, laurels, and distinctions, be lost in the shade of monotonous uniformity. Purity of inclination, and vigor of mind; the ornament of virtue, and the lustre of genius; speculative wisdom, and practical sense; each may toil through the labor of lengthened exertion, or burst out in flashes of transient illumination: but it is the phalanx of their united force, that Commands obedience, or incites to love: that treads down the weak-

nefs of momentary opposition, and reaches the goal of the race of fame.

The priveleges of talent and virtue, are so rarely enjoyed together in the wald in which we live; that we see daily before our eyes the lamentable spectacle of vice triumphing over the dignity of intellect, and piety swayed by the sceptre of dulnefs; industry assisted by the light of invention, and genius exuberant without regularity. In so diversified a manner are these natural endowments scattered among the countless myriads of the human family, that but few out of the mighty throng can reach our ideas of excellence, or pass uninjured through the fiery ordeal of critical investigation. To embellish learning by morality, and add discretion to mental superiority, is a point of majestic character, to which not many attain, and of which few can estimate the value.

We are not, however, in this view of things, to as-

cribe every deficiency to the parsimony of Nature, and the partiality of distribution. Although it is undoubtedly not in the power of mortal creatures to give birth to any powers, which they have obtained not from a higher source; yet, it may easily be seen, that much of that honor which might accrue, to steady principle and virtuous action, is wrested from the professor by that thoughtless levity, which cannot rightly distinguish the constituent principles of solid reputation: which creates to itself false imaginations of human judgment; and aims at eminence, without a clue to its approach. Much of that excellence which is so apparent in the greater part of those who walk before our eyes in the scenes of public life; is owing, not so much to either depth or comprehension of original powers, as

to that capability of improvement, which increases by cultivation what is insignificant by nature. Bright as the light of native mind may glister while its novelty continues, it will not last when the first blaze of glory is overpast, and it remains tempered by judgment, to steady its flame, and virtue, to chasten its splendor. There is no chance for permanent influence from him who plumes himself on the profession of one brilliant quality, which is to atone for every offence, and cover every defect. Love is essential to willing obedience: and his dictates will always be followed, who confirms precepts by example.

There are particular stations and occupations in life, where circumspection in every action, prudence in the management of conduct, and consistency of sentiment with practice, are especially necessary,

because they are so generally conspicuous. Without taking all of them into present consideration, we shall confine ourselves to one profession: and when we introduce the clergy as the topic of animadversion, it is not without knowing, that we speak of evils which none will contradict, and truths which cannot be denied.

The ecclesiastical order may be divided into three distinct kinds, without much violence to the nature of things as they exist at present. The flippant coxcomb, the sober divine, and the formal prig, each in their different walk, present a strong and striking contrast of public appearance, and private department. The first are many few take the middle, which is nature's course; and the last, who stiffens his conduct into repulsive coldness, and unmeaning restraint, has more

compeers than both together can annoy. Those who pursue the path of easy rectitude, must of necessity, with those of other professions, wear the same character, and exhibit the same appearance: but when freedom degenerates into offensive buffoonery, ~~or~~ dignity is distorted into shattered uniformity, under the garb of the clerical office; there is, in both cases, a violence offered to nature and feeling, which, in such a line of life, is tantalizing the expectations of man, and insulting the purity of heaven.

The greatest part of that boisterous foppery which is so disgusting in our ministerial order, may be traced to a better source than the vulgar desire, of aping the follies of those meaner votaries of pleasure, whose part upon the stage is the coarseness of convivial mirth, and the pride of empty affectation. The evil is most probably to be attributed to the nature of their occupation itself. When the orator has

concluded the duties of his official capacity, on the rostrum of public harangue; he ends, not like the worldly declaimer, to be startled with argument, or crushed by opposition. The maxims of truth, and the dogmas of falsehood, come alike free from danger from the lips of him, who has no immediate enemy to encounter, and no well-armed disputant to repel. He asserts, and there is none to refute — he questions, and there is none to answer — he thunders, and there is none to reply. The majority of those that listen, are not those that can take up the weapons of controversy, even if their will spurs them to the contest. The results of closet meditation are therefore suffered to pass quietly by, without discernment to unveil their error, or learning to sap their foundations. The pulpit herald freely lifts his voice, descends when his treasure is exhausted, and mixes in the common crowd, to be greeted with the cringe of the sy

ophant, and daubed with the adulation of the slave.

When all this is taken into the reckoning, we are induced in some measure to palliate those faults, which in so sacred a character, deepen into enormity. But, it must be confessed, that there is nothing more offensive to sober conduct, and reasonable department, than to see men, in every respect like ourselves, with the same affections, and the same passions, carrying the tone of authority from the desk into the world, and filling every corner with the jarring sound of imperative dictation. That humility, which the religion under whose influence we live so forcibly enjoins, forbids the manifest a perversion of the most heavenly uses of the priestly office: and to attempt to restore the habits of an age, when men were but the slavish vassals of mankish superstition, and clerical usurpation, is rather to explain a contradiction to the usages, the privileges, and

the habits, which are the glory of the times, and the pride of the world.

Of the notions which men, in the intercourse of life, severally chance to adopt, those are certainly the most endurable, which injure none but themselves. It will therefore be more patiently suffered, that the natural tendencies of the heart, should be strained into stately coldness, than launch forth into universal officiousness. It affords fit subject, however, for harmless merriment, to see the misguided stripling, after joking for twenty years with the companions of his youthful pleasures; joining in the laughs of hilarity, and indulging in the revelry of mirth; laying aside on a sudden the open ingenuousness of undissembled simplicity, winking his features to a frown, and relaxing into a frozen smile.

If religion be not social in its principles; if it should stifle the charities of life, and chill

the current of the soul; why not step forth openly in defence of so repugnant a doctrine, and carry it out to its extremest limits? Why do not these contracted formalists cease to advocate a system in words, whose truth they contradict in practice, and end in the gloom of monastic solitude, the days they cannot spend among men? The habitations of The pleasures of a life, past in the enjoyments of reciprocal intercourse, are too refined for the shallow-minded bigot, who only measures piety by dulness, and dignity by constraint. And, without doubt, his religion is to be estimated of very little value, who, after ~~living~~ copying for a succession of years ~~after~~ the forms and observances of common life, thinks it necessary, when he doffs the colored coat, and assumes the ministerial robe, to darken his visage with the blackness

of the sepulchre, shed the gloom of austerity wherever he approaches and leave existence without ~~a comfort to cheer~~, a pleasure to enliven, ~~and~~ a ray to ~~illumine~~ animate, and a comfort to cheer. The days of mankery are over — nature has assumed her station, and the age of Christianity, which is the age of reason, triumphs over the wreck of worldly devices, and the ruin of human inventions.

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